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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (CAPTIONS ADDED)

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SUBJECT: ICELAND: PRESIDENT GRIMSSON ANNOUNCES HIS RE-ELECTION BID
FOR A FOURTH TERM

¶1. (U) Summary: Icelandic President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson announced in his televised New Year's Day Address that he will run for a fourth term as President of Iceland in the presidential election on June 28. By doing so, he has put on hold any aspirations of taking a high-level international office. Both politicians and the public have reacted rather positively to the news, and, in the absence of any political controversy involving Grimsson, he is set to win the election this summer. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, President of Iceland and Head of State but not Government, quieted any rumors in his New Year's Day address that he would not be running for the fourth term as President in this year's election. If re-elected, Grimsson would be the third President to have served a fourth four-year term, for a total of sixteen years.

¶3. (U) Rumors had been flying that Grimsson was either going to run for election again or make a career change. There was speculation that Grimsson might take a high-profile international job, for example, with the United Nations. An English-language biography, that was slated to be published before Christmas, has been put on hold indefinitely. The biography, probably intended to raise Grimsson's international profile, was widely construed as preparation for a career change.

¶4. (U) The chairmen and spokespersons of the five major political parties said that Grimsson's announcement did not come as a surprise. Steingrímur J. Sigfússon, Chairman of the Left-Green Movement, said that he likes the idea of limiting the President's tenure to two six-year terms. The chairmen and spokesmen of the other four parties do not agree with Sigfússon, but Thorgerður Katrín Gunnarsdóttir, the Deputy Chairman of the Independence Party, says that perhaps the constitutional role of the President should be revised.

¶5. (U) The January 2 editorial in Morgunblaðið, Iceland's newspaper-of-record, said that Grimsson is somewhat eager to regain the trust that he lost in the 2004 presidential election. Voter turnout in the 2004 election was only 62.9 percent, out of which 20 percent were empty ballots, or protest votes. Note: In parliamentary elections the voter turnout ranges between 80 and 90 percent. End Note. The editorialist added that the 2004 election results should not have come as a surprise because Grimsson had taken steps to politicize the Presidency. Since the office has become more controversial under Grimsson, the editorialist said that it begs the question whether term limits should be imposed as is customary in other countries.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: There is no limit on how many times one can run for President in Iceland. Olafur Ragnar Grimsson has been relatively popular across the political spectrum as President and his

announcement to run for the fourth time has been generally welcomed. An incumbent President has always won a re-election, and therefore it is almost certain that he will win the election on June 28 even if he is challenged. If there are no other contenders then he will win automatically. In the last election in 2004 more votes than ever before were empty ballots, or protest votes, which was most likely due to Grimsson's controversial move not to sign a hotly contested law on media ownership. Barring any such contentious spectacle, Grimsson's re-election is a near certainty. End Comment.

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